

THE **GULL**



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 107 NO. 3 SUMMER 2023

NEW INITIATIVE PROTECTS BAY SHORELINE FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

BY BLAKE EDGAR

At the mouth of Islais Creek on San Francisco's eastern waterfront, surrounded by the sights and sounds of industry, five acres of tidal wetland and upland shore habitat at Pier 94 are returning to a natural state. Since 2006, dedicated Golden Gate Audubon volunteers have removed construction debris, reduced the incursion of eastern cordgrass and other invasive plants, imported rock and sand (including some from the site occupied by Salesforce Tower) to create a base layer (substrate), and planted native marsh plants, grasses, and shrubs.

CONTINUED on page 3

Black Turnstone.
Alan Krakauer





Golden Eagle at Altamont.

Elizabeth Winstead

A WIN-WIN SETTLEMENT: SAFEGUARDING GOLDEN EAGLES IN THE PURSUIT OF CLEAN ENERGY

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In pursuit of clean and sustainable energy, wind farms are crucial for our renewable energy infrastructure. From the beginning, conservationists have raised concerns about the potential impact of wind farms on wildlife, particularly iconic species like the Golden Eagle. Locally, Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area (APWRA) has been a challenge. As one of the nation's first wind farms, it was developed before any understanding of appropriate siting and remains a case study for poorly sited energy infrastructure.

The recent settlement reached between Brookfield Energy, Alameda County, and a consortium of Audubon groups including Golden Gate Audubon, Mount Diablo Audubon, Ohlone Audubon, Santa Clara Valley Audubon, and National Audubon over the Mulqueeney Ranch Wind Repowering Project in the APWRA is a win for all parties involved, especially for Golden Eagles.

One of the key elements of the settlement is the use of IdentiFlight, an automated system designed to safeguard Golden Eagles and other large raptors. IdentiFlight employs

advanced video imaging and machine learning technology to detect and identify bird movements, enabling turbines to temporarily shut down when eagles approach. By integrating IdentiFlight into the wind farm's operations, the settlement ensures the risk of collisions between turbines and Golden Eagles is significantly minimized.

Another crucial aspect of the settlement is the establishment of more stringent conservation measures. By setting a lower threshold for when adaptive management is required, from six to four deceased Golden Eagles, the agreement emphasizes the importance of monitoring and responding promptly to any potential negative impacts on the species. This change promotes greater vigilance and ensures that corrective actions are taken in a timelier manner.

Furthermore, the settlement requires that plans be submitted to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) earlier in the permitting process. By involving the TAC at an earlier stage, the perspectives and expertise of scientists and regulators charged with ensuring environmental compliance can be incorporated into the decision-making process. This collaborative approach fosters transparency, accountability, and the potential for well-informed decisions that balance the needs of renewable energy and environmental conservation.

By acknowledging the potential risks posed to Golden Eagles and taking proactive measures to mitigate those risks, the settlement reached between Brookfield Energy, Alameda County, and Audubon advocates, models a responsible path toward sustainable energy generation.

NEWS BRIEFS

New Board Member

Brandy Deminna Ford is a professional writer and editor who specializes in development communications. She is currently a member of the University Development and Alumni Relations team at UCSF, a certified Master Birder, and a volunteer with the Marin County Breeding Bird Atlas.

Covel and Roemer Awards

On Sunday May 21, Golden Gate Audubon awarded its annual Elsie Roemer Conservation Award to California Senator Nancy Skinner, and the Paul Covell Education Conservation Award to long-time conservation advocate and educator Dr. Carol Baird at the Birdathon 2023 Awards Celebration.

Altamont Settlement

In May, Golden Gate Audubon, Mount Diablo Audubon, Ohlone Audubon, Santa Clara Valley Audubon, and National Audubon helped secure protections for Golden Eagles in the Altamont Pass by reaching a settlement with wind project developer Brooklyn Renewable.

Bird-Safe Berkeley Ordinance

After months of campaigning and community support, the City of Berkeley approved its first bird-safe building ordinance in June. The ordinance helps reduce deadly bird-glass collisions by requiring large housing projects and office buildings in Berkeley to make transparent and reflective surfaces bird-safe.



A bird's eye view of Pier 94.

INITIATIVE from page 1

This former dump site near Hunters Point is being reborn as a salt marsh with renewed habitat for birds and mammals. It is providing greater access to wildlife watching for Bayview's human community. It also shows promise as a site for nurturing native Olympia oyster beds that were once abundant in San Francisco Bay. Beyond that, Pier 94 provides a proof-of-concept, small-scale demonstration of the sort of nature-based, restorative response to climate change that should encompass more of the Bay's shoreline.

Building on what we have learned at Pier 94, Golden Gate Audubon is expanding such efforts by launching a new initiative to promote nature-based solutions to sea level rise, flooding, and other effects of climate change. While maintaining our frontline advocacy to defend existing natural systems, such as at Point Molate in Richmond, from further degradation or development, Golden

Golden Gate Audubon will ramp up our restoration work to generate bird-friendly shoreline habitat and public open space.

Gate Audubon will ramp up our restoration work to generate bird-friendly shoreline habitat and public open space.

The initiative launched in spring with a generous pledge from an anonymous donor—marking the largest single donation in the organization's history. While the pledge provides substantial funding for the next three years, additional fundraising will be necessary to achieve the initiative's benchmark goals, including a plan to hire the organization's first conservation director in several years.

Since last year, a committee of Golden Gate Audubon board members and engaged volunteers has met regularly to explore ways to proactively address the pervasive threat that climate change poses to the birds and ecosystems we seek to protect. The committee considered several possible focus areas, such as green buildings, renewable energy, food and agriculture, and transportation. The committee's discussions and a survey of Golden Gate Audubon members, volunteers, and supporters determined that nature-based shoreline solutions aligned best with the organization's mission and offered opportunities to advance climate mitigation and environmental justice.

Mashes and other natural Bay edges (as opposed to riprap and seawalls) sequester carbon in soil and vegetation and also provide a buttress against storm surges and sea level rise. Wetland soils retain much more

carbon than soils in grasslands or forests. According to estimates by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, coastal wetlands can hold up to five times more carbon than a comparable area of tropical forest. Recent data from the University of California at Berkeley revealed Dutch Slough, a restored wetland in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, to be in the top one percent of habitats measured worldwide for carbon-storage capacity.

As part of the new initiative, Golden Gate Audubon will review our current and future habitat restoration projects, prioritizing them for carbon sequestration and other contributions to climate resilience. We will collaborate with like-minded partners and participate in efforts such as the Regionally Advancing Living Shorelines Project to create habitat for shorebirds and recreational space for people while increasing climate resilience. We will also undertake a comprehensive audit of Golden Gate Audubon's carbon footprint and take steps to reduce it across programs and activities.

Each of us can play a part, and each of us has a stake in the outcome. Interested volunteers can participate in restoration work at Pier 94 on the first Saturday morning of each month. Sign up in advance at the Golden Gate Audubon website. Anyone interested in joining the climate committee or submitting ideas can contact climate@goldengateaudubon.org.



Alan Krakauer

Willets.

BIRDING, CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND EVERYTHING IN-BETWEEN

BY CAROLINA PRADO

On International Workers' Day, I was practicing birding by ear at Valle Vista when I identified a Warbling Vireo all on my own. Walking under the trees, I was thinking about my dad, surely already out at work under the sun. Experiencing both the weight of this day, which means so much to those of us who have grown up working class, and searching for the bird choir had me looking for meaning in their connection. Some days I wake up feeling little hope that we will build a world where we are in right relationship with the earth and with each other. When will I not wake up to the murder of a transgender person, a school shooting, or another human rights violation at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center?

Hearing the vireo on May Day, however, brought me back to the knowledge that people power can continue to change things for the better. Trying to identify a bird's song encapsulates so much about the collective and the individual. How can we shift our perspectives to not just include our own bodily self? When you use your senses with care to identify a bird, you change your perspective. Where is that sound coming from, the left or the right? The top of the tree or the underbrush? What colors do I see? Be a quiet being. Watch where you step there are ticks, Whose feather is that on the ground? Having this sensory awareness



Carolina Prado, a Golden Gate Audubon Birding for Everyone Scholarship recipient, is a queer Chicana from Santa Ana, CA.

Photo courtesy Carolina Prado

shifts your perspective on the world around you by including others and the larger ecosystems that deserve our attention and care.

The lessons you get from paying attention around you, even here; on a human made trail, in a busy place, extend to our relationship to birds. These little ways of situating ourselves with non-humans offer us insight into the big world we live and struggle in. I teach university students about health issues in Latine/x communities, and one of the key things I keep bringing us back to during conversations around cultural competency in the health field is, you have to listen. And, you need to know some things, right? How

do race, gender, sexuality, documentation status, and class impact our relationship to health? Having this foundational knowledge allows you to truly listen to your patient, to your community member. In the same way, you need to know a little bit about where birds nest, what they might be trying to hunt/eat, what season specific birds might be in the area, etc. Whether the goal is to identify that bird's trill or identify how to best serve our community members in this society full of injustice, the core is simple and old, ancestral even: listen intently and think about your relationship to your surroundings.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Membership Meeting

Take full advantage of your membership by joining our annual Membership Meeting on August 17 at the David Brower Center. Golden Gate Audubon members will have the opportunity to vote in the organization's forthcoming name approved by the Board of Directors.

Berkeley Bird Festival

Save the date! Berkeley Bird Festival will return for its third year on Sunday, October 15. This free one-day community event offers a wide range of activities and opportunities to appreciate our local birdlife and habitat. Interested in volunteering at the festival? Please contact bbf@goldengateaudubon.org.

Return of the Terns

Join East Bay Regional Parks and Golden Gate Audubon's Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve committee on Sunday, July 16 to celebrate the California Least Tern, an endangered species. For more information, search EBRP's calendar for "Return of the Terns" at ebparks.org/calendar.

Coastal Cleanup Day

Beat the crowds of other Coastal Cleanup Day events and join us over at Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline to clean up important bird habitat on Saturday, September 16 from 9:30 am–12 pm. To register for this event, see our website page goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer.

SPEAKER SERIES



Black-footed Albatross.

BUILDING A BIRD FRIENDLY CITY

GLENN PHILLIPS

HYBRID

Thursday, August 17

7 p.m. program

Zoom and In-person at David Brower Center



Photo by Jeremy Huang on Unsplash

On June 6, Berkeley's City Council approved the Bay Area's newest and strongest bird-safe building ordinance. Find out what this new ordinance means for buildings in Berkeley and learn how to make your home safer for birds.

Glenn Phillips, Golden Gate Audubon's Executive Director holds a masters in Urban Sustainability and Science Education from the City University of New York and is a co-author of the Bird Friendly Building Guide published by the American Bird Conservancy. He has worked on bird-safe buildings since 2007.

OFFSHORE WIND AND SEABIRDS IN CALIFORNIA

WHITNEY GROVER

ZOOM

Thursday, July 20
7 p.m. program
Zoom

Offshore wind is an important part of the solution to meet California's clean renewable energy goals, reduce our carbon pollution, and mitigate the worst outcomes of climate change. But offshore wind energy infrastructure may have negative impacts on the marine environment, including seabird collision. Seabirds already face many challenges and we have the opportunity to plan ahead for California's first two offshore wind projects to prevent collisions and protect our incredible diversity of seabirds. We'll look at which seabirds are most vulnerable to collisions, what the risk of collision is based on offshore wind farms around the world, and how we can prevent the worst impacts.

Whitney Grover, Golden Gate Audubon's Deputy Director, recently earned an M.S. in Environmental Management from USF with a concentration in Ecology. Her final Master's Project, *Offshore Wind Energy and Seabird Collision Vulnerability in California*, reviewed and synthesized the current scientific literature, applying lessons learned from U.K. projects to California.

Zoom links and passcodes for upcoming presentations
are available on our Speaker Series website at
goldengateaudubon.org/education/speaker-series.

UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF AVIAN KERATIN DISORDER IN ALASKA

DANIELLE GERIK

ZOOM

Thursday, September 21
7 p.m. program
Zoom



Kenneth R. Whitten

Avian keratin disorder (AKD) is an outbreak of debilitating beak deformities affecting wild birds. First observed among Black-capped Chickadees in Alaska in the late 1990s it now appears to affect a variety of species across a broad geographic area. Danielle Gerik will present results of tracking AKD across the globe using citizen science and will discuss which bird species might be most vulnerable.

Danielle Gerik is a biologist with the Alaska Science Center in Anchorage, Alaska. She earned her master's degree at the University of Alaska Fairbanks studying shorebirds in Arctic Alaska. Prior to joining the Alaska Science Center as a biologist, Danielle worked as a field biologist on several avian research projects across the state.



Dotson Marsh, courtesy Rick Lewis.

DOTSON FAMILY MARSH: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY MAUREEN LAHIFF

Dotson Family Marsh, on the shore of San Pablo Bay in Richmond, is a spectacular place for birding in the fall and winter. Checklists on eBird for this hotspot include over 100 species of birds for October through March.

By mid-August, shorebirds return for San Pablo Bay's food and shelter. Most remain until mid-March, when many begin to show bright breeding plumage (Black-bellied Plovers getting black belly feathers; American Avocets getting beautiful cinnamon feathers on their necks and heads). By early November, the shorebirds are joined by an array of wintering ducks. In most species of ducks, the males are coming into their bright plumage since ducks form their pair bonds for the upcoming breeding season while here for the winter. These "wintering" birds join a wealth of waterbirds here year round: waders like Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, and Snowy Egrets; Black Oystercatchers and Black Turnstones foraging the rocky shoreline. As you might expect with coastal wetlands, there is rail habitat used by elusive Virginia and Ridgway's rails.

In addition to wetlands and bay shoreline, Dotson Marsh includes coastal prairie, where Savannah Sparrows and Western Meadowlarks can be seen at close range.

The uplands at Dotson Marsh draw spectacular

raptors—Northern Harriers and White-tailed Kites, Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks. Occasionally, an Osprey or a Bald Eagle flies over. There are falcons—American Kestrels and Peregrine Falcons perched on power poles, and even an occasional wintering Merlin. There are chances to see Great Horned Owls, Barn Owls, sometimes a wintering Burrowing Owl or a Short-eared Owl hunting over the grasslands near sunset.

In 2017, the East Bay Regional Park District completely restored 100 acres of Dotson Marsh. Planning for the impacts of climate change, the project utilized soft engineering to protect roads and the railway rather than building a hard seawall. The Rheem Creek watershed has also been restored to bring back riparian function and prevent flooding in upstream neighborhoods.

Just after crossing the bridge over Rheem Creek, a level dirt trail alongside the creek leads almost all the way to the creek mouth. This creek channel is a good place for a first look at ducks, and farther along the trail shorebirds roost at high tide. The main trail is part of the Bay Trail, but for better birding, turn left after about a half mile onto the China Clipper Trail before taking the Cordgrass Jetty Trail along the edge of a cove and out near the tip of the jetty.

For more information, visit the East Bay Parks District website ebparks.org.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact rnakano@goldengateaudubon.org.

DONATIONS

Golden Gate Audubon gratefully acknowledges the generous donors, volunteers and trip leaders who contributed during our 2023 Birdathon fundraiser. We also appreciate all those who registered for trips and participated in our online auction.

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Remember the Birds

Including Golden Gate Audubon in your estate plan is a generous way to ensure that the Bay Area remains a haven for the birds you love.

A bequest can be expressed in a will as simply as, "I bequeath [a sum of money, a percentage of my estate, or an IRA, life insurance policy or investment/bank account] to Golden Gate Audubon Society, 2150 Allston Way, Suite 210, Berkeley, CA 94704."

Consult with your attorney to discuss your particular situation. Learn more on our website at goldengateaudubon.org/legacy.

Please know that we work hard to ensure the accuracy of this list. If your name has been omitted or misspelled, let us know at 510.843.2222.

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MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Audubon Society's mission is to inspire people to protect Bay Area birds and our shared natural environment.

ABOUT GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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1 Climate Initiative

Golden Gate Audubon launches a new initiative focused on nature-based solutions to address climate change.

2 Protecting Golden Eagles

Audubon chapters secure protections for Golden Eagles in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area in recent settlement.

6 Dotson Marsh

Wonderful fall and winter birding hotspot in Richmond models climate-conscious restoration efforts in the Bay Area.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Allen's Hummingbird.

CITY BIRD, COUNTRY BIRD

BY CLAY ANDERSON

In terms of frequency of sightings in the San Francisco Bay Area, the Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus sasin*) is the middle bird in a group of three hummingbird species. There's the resident Anna's Hummingbird and there's the Rufous Hummingbird which passes through in the spring on its way to its breeding grounds further north. Most often found on the west side of the coast range during its breeding season (March through July), Allen's Hummingbird sightings are more sporadic and unreliable through the rest of the year. Another 'middle' thing about Allen's is that while the Rufous is primarily a gold color and the Anna's is primarily a green color, the

Allen's is a combination of gold and green.

Because of its narrow geographical breeding range along the Pacific coast it's projected to lose a large part of its breeding habitat due to sea-level rise/global warming. This could have a major impact on its population, considering its population size relative to other hummingbirds is limited (700,000); compared to Anna's (5 million), and Rufous (19 million).

The good news is, there is a recognized subspecies in the Allen's population (*S. sasin sedentarius*) that is not so dependent on its historical range. This population can be found year-round in the Los Angeles area. This group has adapted to feeding on street trees, hummingbird feeders and nesting in close proximity to regular human activity. Scientists believe that as sea level rises, this group will move inland with the human population and continue to take advantage of 'artificial' landscapes.

Considering this all comes to pass, it would be a boon to the collective human experience to plant regional native nectar/food plants that are normally found in the Allen's traditional geographic range, in our own backyards; plants like Bush Monkey flower, any of the native (*Ribes* spp.) currants and gooseberries, native penstemons (Penstemon and Kekia spp.) and Madrone.

Along with non-native food sources, these native backyard plants could serve as insurance against the challenges of global warming for this species, without increasing the cost. Native plants generally require far less water, fertilization and care than non-natives. This would also extend the opportunity for migratory Allen's hummingbirds (*S. sasin sasin*) to become more tolerant of the human environment and enable them to maintain their 'middle' position for frequency seen in the Bay Area.